The February 2012 issue of the Workforce Development Brief continues to bring new information to members of the ASQ Education Division.

**GUEST EDITORIAL**

**Competency-Based Learning**

Competency-based learning pays big dividends for both the individual and the business.

**Workforce Development and Improvement**

This fifth installment of a six-part series provides information on one of the five components of a framework for the field of workforce development: the new economy.

**Professional Ethics: An Introduction to Implementation**

This article launches a series on how to design and implement an ethics training program that will assure your organization’s success.

**Intrinsic Motivation**

**Motivation and Work**

The third installment of this series on motivation describes an approach that you can use to discover your motivated abilities.

**Building Professional Connections**

Learn more about the benefits of membership in the Workforce Development Network, which fosters exchange of information and experiences.

**LINKS TO OTHER ARTICLES OF INTEREST**

- **What is Workforce Development?**
  

- **Workforce Development is More Than Just Training**
  

- **Morris Library: Workforce Education and Development Research Guide**
  
  This website offers links to research in workforce education and development.  
  [http://libguides.lib.siu.edu/workforce_education](http://libguides.lib.siu.edu/workforce_education)

The Workforce Development Brief is provided for members of the Education Division three times per year. Articles generally should be 1,000-1,200 words in length and should be submitted to the editor, Deborah Hopen, at debhopen@nventure.com.
You’ve probably heard the speculation that none of us want a foot doctor performing brain surgery on our mothers. We all want our personal physicians to be competent in their respective areas of practice. We want them to have attended a prestigious medical school and to have provided medical services successfully for several years before “practicing” on us.

Along the same lines, who would want a person who passed a written auditor exam but had not participated in a single actual audit or been certified by an accredited agency to be an environmental or quality management system auditor? Any auditor who did not have practical application experience in addition to the associated education and training, probably would not possess the correct competencies. More than likely, the inept company that selected this auditor would have major difficulties attempting to sell its products or services to customers expecting compliant, quality offerings.

Competent auditors also need people skills to achieve success in their field. Competency training for auditors includes the practical application of expertise under the guidance of a lead auditor. The rigorous preparation process for these positions includes a combination of training for awareness, knowledge, practical application of skills, and attitude (the soft skills side of the training). The emphasis in this type of teaching usually lies in the continued performance and practical application of a task and the flexibility to deal with unexpected situations in the workplace.

Is there a difference between proficiency and competency? Examinations, testing, and resulting scores can measure proficiency. One could argue that competency truly cannot be measured, as it is a combination of skills and personal attributes (behaviors) gained through experience, practical application, and continuous learning. Book intelligence alone does not guarantee success in life or on the job. Individuals are more successful in life and work situations when they possess a full range of competencies, skills, and character, in addition to the job-required qualifications.

Certification programs use a combination of experience and education, training, and skills. An individual must meet minimum criteria before having the opportunity to sit for an exam. Once the examination is completed successfully, a certification award provides identification and recognition of abilities and competencies,
which helps individuals to be more mobile and employable. Continued use of the skills that come with the certification, as well as continued experience and education, increase the competencies of an individual, thereby creating a more flexible, valuable individual worthy of recertification.

In today’s challenging economic environment, we find more and more businesses allowing cost and budget constraints to override the needs and requirements for workforce competencies. Recently, I overheard two discussions concerning financial constraints versus competencies. In one scenario, budget reductions could potentially cause the replacement of three employees who were trained and adept in their abilities to perform their particular duties satisfactorily. They might soon be replaced at a lower cost to the customer with 2.5 employees who are trained but do not have the experience, knowledge, and skills needed for these particular positions. The customer is concentrating solely on cost and is not concerned with aptitude and productivity. In the second scenario, the discussion related to a reduction in pay grade for a specific job. Again, the sole impetus was cost. In this case, reducing the pay grade for the position could mean that a more experienced, more adept individual could be overlooked in favor of a lower paid, less skilled individual. Both of these actions may almost certainly result in decreased efficiency and productivity and lower staff morale, with a possible impact to service and/or product safety and quality. These businesses might truly be suffering from a lack of competency-based programs. The perceived cost will be lower, however, in the immediate opinion of the customer.

In workplace environments where processes and/or products/services include safety-critical characteristics, it becomes even more important to maintain the right people with the appropriate skills who can effectively, efficiently, and safely perform the tasks. Without a workforce-competency-development system, an organization is at risk of not meeting its business objectives or satisfying its customers. The lack of a skilled workforce could even result in personnel injury or damage to product or equipment because of inexperienced or untrained employees making inappropriate decisions and/or acting improperly. Faulty product/service and/or process delays also could be introduced because of lack of workforce ability.

It is fitting for businesses to invest time and resources in the accurate matching of employee competencies with tasks and to focus on continuously building the knowledge and skills needed for each position. Use of competency-based programs increases job performance and prepares the workforce to be more flexible in dealing with changing requirements or when new processes or products/services are introduced. Benefits of competency-based learning programs provide for increased efficiencies, resulting in increased profits. Additionally, employees who are encouraged to develop their competencies are more satisfied with their jobs and develop more self-confidence, which could contribute to a decrease in staff turnover. Personnel who are more competent and confident with their skills often are more likely to become creative and innovative and usually are eager to participate in additional learning and development activities. This progression contributes to the continuous competency-based learning system.

Businesses that adopt competency-based learning programs provide an environment for personnel to conduct self-assessments and then seek additional training and/or experience to acquire or improve capabilities. A set of profiles would be developed to include the knowledge, skills, qualifications, and behaviors required for specific tasks. Each task or role would have a corresponding curriculum for the individual to complete to gain the capability to perform the task or role successfully. The competency-based learning platform is a continuous learning process that builds on experience and qualifications.

Although these characteristics are difficult to measure and assess, they often are based on the ability to react quickly, be flexible during a specific situation, and perform the job correctly. Those who have experience and continuous competency-based training can interpret situations more accurately and quickly and make the most appropriate choices. Competency increases with experience. As with any other continuous improvement process, the competency-based learning program must be evaluated periodically to confirm that workforce abilities are improving. Methods of validation (self-assessments, competency-based behavioral interviews, simulations, etc.) must be deployed to assess both employee and business position improvements. An effective competency-based learning program will result in a successful, competitive, and profitable business with an expert, confident, and loyal workforce.

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Workforce Development and Improvement

Thomas G. Berstene

In the first article of this series, I laid the groundwork by discussing Jacobs and Hawley’s workforce development criteria. They identified five interrelated streams that act as driving forces in human resources development: globalization, technology, the new economy, political changes, and demographic shifts. In this piece I will explore how the new economy affects workforce development.

In general, the economy impacts the labor force as a whole in several ways—creating or eliminating jobs, opening or closing the flow of wage earners entering retirement, affecting the size of the job market, requiring different types of knowledge and skills for success, etc. Jacobs and Hawley define workforce development as “…the coordination of public and private sector policies and programs that provides individuals with the opportunity for a sustainable livelihood and helps organizations achieve exemplary goals, consistent with the societal context.” From the time that Jacobs and Hawley developed this definition much has changed in the world economically.

The concept of the new economy still is debated by many, but it appears to have its roots in the transition from a manufacturing- to a service-based economy, as seen in the United States during the 1980s and 90s. The technological “bubble” that burst in the late 1990s introduced more questions about this new economy than answers. In reflection, the changes we are going through now and the issues we are encountering with the workforce actually started earlier and are part of a slowly evolving revolution as described by Thomas Kuhn in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

If we look back to other events in the same period, we find Michael Hammer and others advocating the reengineering of our organizations to improve our effectiveness, efficiency, and ultimately our profitability. As well-meaning as these efforts were intended, the labor force, along with the economy, began to change.

Based on their research, Jacobs and Hawley suggested that free-market capitalism was not what it had been. In fact, since they wrote about job market development, much has changed. Our experiments with socialistic capitalism, a capital-based economy with a number of entitlements or social welfare programs attached has lead, not only the United States but also almost the entire planet, into a global recession. Countries such as Greece, Italy, and Spain are looking at massive unemployment and national debt. France has raised its retirement age and cut back on other entitlements to stave off the same debts. The European Union is in a state of flux, fighting for its very existence, which undoubtedly will affect the rest of the global economies.

Similar to a scientific revolution, this economic revolution has economists and politicians...
reevaluating the basics of Keynesian economics as Alperovitz discussed in his article on "The New-Economy Movement." What will the new economy be? This is yet to be determined; however, the implications for the working people are clear.

Today we are seeing a slowdown in the number of employees opting to retire. This is happening for a number of reasons, including the following:

- Governmental changes that have raised the retirement-benefit age.
- Workers’ personal retirement investments have shrunk due to the failing economy.
- Workers are being forced to dip into their retirement funds temporarily to supplement unemployment when their jobs are eliminated.

Those workers who have not been forced out by job cuts are worried about how long it will take to rebuild their retirement nest eggs.

Many older personnel are finding that their knowledge bases and skill sets are becoming obsolete. They need retraining to fill new jobs that are being created—or they need to pursue a new career altogether. For instance, while I served in the military, I counseled many on the career changes they were facing as they completed their service contracts or retired. The transition from military service to the civilian world often requires additional education, training, or experience.

People facing these difficult changes—especially those who worked in the same field for several decades—are likely to need support. Many states are sponsoring assistance programs, often through their community colleges. The psychological fears and financial stresses that are experienced when embarking on this journey require other types of support, such as counseling and financial aid.

In contrast, it also is hard for those trying to enter the job market for the first time. Many are frustrated that even with a university education they cannot find a job—partially because hiring managers feel these graduates are not work-ready. This presents a problem for high schools and universities. For example, Connecticut currently is grappling with how to leverage technical high school education with schools that provide many non-university-bound students with specific knowledge and skills needed to enter the labor force capably. How do we build appropriate connections between technical high schools and local industries to ensure work readiness?

Even in this economy, there are jobs available for new wage earners. The challenge is to blend retrained, experienced workers who are taking on new jobs and new recruits. This issue has major implications on labor force development, which are magnified by many job losses occurring today.

Whether we’re dealing with the new economy or a repackaged version of the old economy, the issues that confront workforce development have not changed drastically. Rather, they have been highlighted by the current recession. Retirements have slowed and been replaced with high levels of unemployment. Entry into the job market has become more difficult. The economy is not creating as many new positions as are needed to meet the number of available workers. There is a significant mismatch between the knowledge and skills of those seeking work and job requirements.

As workforce development professionals, we need to become more in tune with the changes in our economy, business, and industry. We need to help recruits become more resilient; in the future most people will face two to three career changes during their work lives (compared to our immediate predecessors who had one career for their entire lives). By becoming more aware of the changing economic landscape, we can help employees rebound, prepare for future developments, and adapt to new jobs more quickly, shortening the recovery time during another economic downturn.

References


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Professional Ethics
An Introduction to Implementation

Bruce Bayley

Ethical dilemmas and how to prepare for them are a constant challenge for workplace trainers and organizational development professionals. To better assist those tasked with creating and implementing an ethics-training program in their organization, this four-part series will provide a strong foundation by providing information on the following topics:

• **An introduction to ethics.** Part one of this series will begin by differentiating among ethics, morals, and virtue, and providing an introduction to basic ethical philosophies and principles. Information from this segment will act as a foundation upon which the remainder of the series will be based.

• **A review of ethical systems.** Part two will build on the thoughts provided in the first segment and expand on those ideals by discussing a variety of dominant ethical systems in use today. These systems serve as the basis of key organizational documents, such as a code of ethics, and should form the nucleus of ethics training and policies.

• **Developing a code of ethics.** Part three will continue the integration of information learned from the previous segments and discuss the importance of a code of ethics and the difference among codes of ethics and codes of conduct, outline the basic principles of a code of ethics, and review the necessary steps for writing and implementing fundamental organizational documents.

• **Reactive versus proactive ethics training.** Part four will conclude the series by discussing a variety of methods currently used to conduct ethics training and highlight the importance of moving away from a reactive training format to one that emphasizes proactive ethics instruction and awareness.

Before any substantive discussion of ethics and ethics training can begin, it’s important to have a clear understanding of the key terms: ethics, morals (or morality), and virtue. Although often used synonymously, ethics and morals are actually two distinct concepts that have uniquely different characteristics. While there are no universally accepted definitions for the two terms, there are general understandings as to the direct and indirect meanings of both. Ethics, in a basic sense, is seen as the philosophical investigation of what constitutes good and bad or right and wrong behavior. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates crystallized
this concept by simply saying that ethics is “What one ought to do.” The challenge, however, is the subjective nature of this explanation, as the classification of good and bad or right and wrong behavior may vary based upon the circumstances and/or the individuals involved. The important component, therefore, of this definition is the concept of a philosophical investigation—as an individual you must critically analyze and identify what you feel is appropriate and inappropriate conduct within your profession. When accomplished, these basic foundations will then serve as the basis for morality and virtue.

Once a firm understanding of your basic ethical ideologies has been established (part two of this series will provide guidance), the development of your organizational guidelines moves beyond the theoretical and into the actual application of the ethical principles your profession or company has adopted. Morals or morality, therefore, are ethics in action. Moral behavior is something judged as good or acceptable conduct, while immoral behavior is an action that has been deemed bad or unacceptable.

On the surface, there may appear to be little difference between the concepts of ethics and morals (which is one reason...
they are often used synonymously). To help clarify the distinctions, think of ethics as the broad theoretical concepts that will guide your organization (for example, we will treat others with respect) and morals as the more focused identification of how you will or won’t accomplish those goals (by always greeting our clients by their first name or by failing to follow up with a client when we promised to do so). In general then, you think ethically, but act morally.2

The good news for organizational trainers and managers is that moral behavior can be learned. Lawrence Kohlberg, a leading theorist on moral development, hypothesized that moral development actually occurs in stages, progressing from an egocentric focus to a more advanced universal point of view. In essence, Kohlberg viewed this progress as movement between three levels, with two stages per level. They are outlined in Table 1.3

Now that ethics and morals have been addressed, the third term is directly related to Kohlberg’s final stage that centers on what should be—that of virtue. While ethics serve as the theoretical foundation for individual and organizational behaviors and morals further define actions as to what one can and cannot or should and should not do, virtue elevates the discussion by focusing on the characteristics that highlight what the ideal person or organization would look like. Many equate this to serving as a good role model, but virtue in its truest sense would look more like the role model’s role model.

Keep in mind, however, that virtue is not the absolute best of everything. In fact, virtue centers on what the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle called the Golden Mean—a harmonious balance between two extremes. In his Catalog of Virtues, Aristotle outlined seven ideals (fear, pleasure, money, honor, anger, truth, and shame).4 Using truth as an example, on one end of the spectrum (referred to as a defect) you would have self-deprecation (honestly outlining all of your flaws and missteps), while at the other end (called excess) you would have boastfulness (factually discussing all of your fine qualities and achievements). The Golden Mean or ideal balance between these two concepts is truthfulness—being neither self-deprecating nor boastful, but honest and forthright when needed or necessary.

In conclusion, think of the relationship among ethics, morals, and virtue as individual cogs in the mechanism (see Figure 1) that help to drive both your personal and organizational value system. Your ethical ideology or framework helps to serve as your strong theoretical foundation from which you then define the behaviors and actions that will identify who and what you are—both as an individual and as a professional. From there, a set of standards can be developed that will help separate you from your peers and begin the process of elevating your organization into a position of ethical leadership within your profession.

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**Figure 1: The Relationship Among Ethics, Morals, and Virtue**

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**References**


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If harnessing intrinsic motivation is important to organizational success (as discussed in the first two articles of this series), how do you discover the abilities that motivate you the most? Several books can guide the process,¹ ² ³ as can a consultant trained in using the System for Identifying Motivated Abilities (SIMA®).

Defining your motivational pattern begins with thinking through your past accomplishments. Identify several that you enjoyed and felt you did well—achievement coupled with satisfaction. You are not looking for mere experiences, milestones, or events of psychological significance; rather, focus on remembering the following:
- What did you do?
- How did you accomplish it?
- What did you use to accomplish it?
- How did you interact with other people?
- Why did you enjoy the accomplishment?

Write down these achievements in detail. Finally, review the detailed descriptions carefully, looking for patterns of behavior that reveal the underlying motivation. Motivational aspects normally are identified and organized into what is sometimes called a Motivated Ability Pattern” (MAP).¹ Broad motivational aspects are payoff, subject matter, circumstances, relationships, and abilities,⁴ although other lists exist. Each of these aspects includes a complex set of behaviors. Every individual will have a different mix of behaviors that come easily and those requiring significantly more effort. The behaviors that come easily are preferred, dominate how you deal with life, and define your motivated pattern.

The central motivational result or payoff is the primary outcome that you seek to achieve when you tap into the other four categories. It is what makes you feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. This can be personal performance, impact or effect on someone or something, personal power, goal achievement, or engagement in a process.

Recurring subject matter is something on which, with which, or though which you enjoy working. It can consist of data, things, senses, people, or ideas, and can be identified by looking at the nouns used in the detailed achievement descriptions.² Most people will have more than one motivating subject that brings them enjoyment.

Motivating circumstances are the situations that stimulate achievement. This can include
involvement, level of structure, environment and nature of external controls, type of recognition and level of visibility, amount of latitude, presence of competition, time constraints, performance measures, and many other types of circumstances. If motivating conditions are not present, there will be a tendency to exert little or no effort.

Operating relationships are the ways you prefer to relate to others and the best way for a supervisor to relate to you. People relate to others and function best in one of three ways:1

- As an individual contributor whose effort does not depend on making others take action.
- As someone who influences others to take action but doesn’t want overall responsibility for confronting others and dealing with adversity.
- As the leader/overseer responsible for putting others’ talents to use to accomplish a goal or get something done.

With supervisors, each person is “comfortable in a certain operating relationship with the authority figures in his or her life. Some people want close, supportive relationships; others want their leaders to point them in a direction and then get out of the way; and still others will work only for people who treat them as equals.”

Motivated abilities are the approaches to a task which come naturally, are absorbing and engaging, and are identified in the verbs you use to describe what you did.2 They include both action (such as writing, building, and drawing) and thought processes (such as planning and analyzing).2 There are several subcategories of motivated abilities. Authors differ on how many and what they are called. A typical list includes the following:1,2

- **Learning/fact finding.** How do you learn or best take in information? This could be through reading, observing, trying, memorizing, asking, or discussing. This ties in with Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences4 and Maslow’s cognitive needs.5
- **Visualizing.** What kind of mental images do you create? This includes conceptualizing, picturing, and imagining.
- **Evaluating.** How do you evaluate information to make decisions? This could be through analyzing, empathizing, weighing pros and cons, calculating, comparing, or assessing worth.
- **Planning.** How do you go about planning what needs to be done? This could be through organizing, practicing, picturing, setting goals, or strategizing.
- **Organizing.** How do you go about preparing to get the work done? This includes how information is used and could incorporate classifying, providing structure, rehearsing, gathering, etc.
- **Creating/Developing.** How did you cause the new object or idea to emerge? It could be through adapting, originating, inventing, growing, constructing, or designing.
- **Overseeing.** How do you work with or through others? Do you facilitate, direct, check, coordinate, lead, inspire, or manage?
- **Influencing.** How do you influence others to respond? Do you bargain, converse, teach, explain, write, suggest, counsel, nurture, or persuade?
- **Doing.** Do you take a “hands-on” approach? Do you operate, maintain, oversee, or manipulate?
- **Performing.** Do you seek an audience? Performing includes athletics, academics, music, acting, and the visual arts.

A thorough analysis of your intrinsic motivations will provide “aha” moments as you recognize the key elements of what motivates you.

**Taking Informed Action**

The insight provided by the motivational theories mentioned in this segment is not complete—in part because the theories are actually more complex than can be described here, but primarily because all motivational theories are limited and cannot give definitive guidance for all situations. These theories can, however, provide knowledge and self-understanding that allows you to identify better which activities will best harness your passion for life and lead to happiness and success. The advanced brain functions that separate humans from other animals allow us to think about what we are going to do before we take action. This process of deliberate thought and choice permits us to rise above our instinctual needs and reactions, as well as our cultural predispositions and motivated abilities, and lets us take an active role in creating our future.

**References**

2. Marlys Hanson and Merle Hanson, *Passion and Purpose: How to Identify and Leverage the Powerful Patterns That Shape Your Work/Life*, Pathfinder Press, 2002.

Author’s Note: Motivated Ability Pattern (MAP) and System for Identifying Motivated Abilities (SIMA) are registered trademarks of People Management International, LLC.

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Building Professional Connections

Adina Suciu

Do you have a job? Are you looking for a job? No matter what your situation, we’ve all learned that having a personal network is becoming more and more important to our short- and long-term futures.

Life used to be simple—go to school and university, get a job, work there for a long time, eventually change jobs one or two times, and then happily retire. It was a well-defined path involving a lot of work, but we had confidence that working hard would pay off in the end. It was about what we knew and to some extent who we knew.

In the recent years, we have learned that the world is changing, and who we know is becoming a really important factor. In fact, “who we know” becomes an excellent source for developing “what we know.” When we connect with people with similar or different professional experiences, we obtain a better understanding of the big picture, including trends, interests, needed skills, challenges, successes, etc. This information helps us make better decisions about our careers and the next steps we should take to develop our competencies.

More than ever, we should remind ourselves that “we don’t know what we don’t know.” One of the best ways to minimize this is to connect with people through professional networks. Aside from keeping us up to date, they also provide a platform for people to express their ideas and discuss topics in which they are interested, get help, and answer our questions. Our connections outside of work are an important component for our overall professional development.

The rapid changes we have faced in recent years have had a direct impact on all of us. Traditional jobs are changing; the workforce is facing increased challenges in adjusting to the demands of new ways of doing business. We all have to learn to adjust and learn new skills, and the speed of change is getting faster and faster. “What is the next best step in my career?” is a common question. “What is the next best step for the professional development of our workforce?” is the on-going question for all leaders.

Good choices in workforce professional development influence the organizational performance positively by strengthening skills and core competencies. Communicating and collaborating with peer professionals gives us the information we need to make better decisions personally and for our organizations.

For quality professionals, the silver lining is the recognition over and over again that systems thinking, process thinking, quality, the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, Lean Six Sigma,
etc., are skills that are needed in all sectors; and they are the critical foundation for excellence in organizations. These skills also are supporting the new trends, for example, the increased need for risk management capabilities. As practitioners, trainers, educators, managers, and leaders we are in a good position to foster the knowledge and best practices in these fields by sharing and collaborating. At a personal level, the more we share and participate, the stronger image and personal brand we’ll possess. At the organizational level, the benefit is visibility, including potentially marketing best practices or having a chance to implement best practices validated by other quality professionals. Organizational collaboration is as important as personal collaboration—we are in a good position to serve as agents and key contributors.

In the age of Twitter and Facebook, online presence becomes a “must” for people and organizations. The Workforce Development networking site is not only the “right place to be” online and to meet fellow professionals, but it also is a “safe” place to exchange ideas without fear of negative feedback or repercussions.

Have you taken ownership of your professional development? As a manager and leader, have you worked with your teams/organizations to take ownership of their professional development? What is your approach? How do you go about fostering their development?

The Education Division extends an invitation to all of you to join the Workforce Development Network site. Please follow the link: http://community.asq.org/networks/Education_Division_Workforce_Development/ to see what’s happening on the Network. It’s your platform to identify, communicate, and promote the use of quality principles, concepts, and technologies for continuous improvement in all aspects of professional development.

The Workforce Development Network includes a discussion board focused on workforce development issues. (More information about the other Education Division discussion boards is available at: http://asq.org/edu/interaction/discussion-board-edu.html). Issues of The Workforce Development Brief are posted on this website, too, along with a free webinar on how to create a learning organization.

Now is the time to check out the Workforce Development Network and connect with others who are involved in similar activities. There’s no better place to share your ideas and learn from others in the same field.

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